



Formal Relationships with Supervisors and Commanding Officers

Formal relationships with supervisors or commanding officers are important to job success and successful workplace reintegration following a deployment. Relationships with workplace authorities will determine whether promotions are forthcoming, the kinds of tasks that get assigned, and on-the-job “quality of life” issues. These **formal** relationships will affect your job satisfaction, success, and retention.

Positive and Negative Effects of Formal Relationships at Work

Developing a positive relationship with superiors leads to:

- Sense of contribution and worth.
- Improved self-esteem.
- Greater confidence.
- Increased job satisfaction.
- Less anxiety.
- Greater support from supervisor.
- More information sharing.
- Being more easily forgiven for errors.
- Greater help in problem-solving
- Increased opportunity for networking.
- Being trusted.
- Being promoted.

Negative relationships with superiors lead to:

- More pressure from supervisors.
- Increased anxiety and stress.
- Feelings of worthlessness.
- Less assistance and forgiveness for problems in performance.
- Less opportunity for information.
- Low trust.
- Little recognition for accomplishments.
- Being less likely to be promoted.

Asking for Help and Communicating Difficulties to Employers or Commanding Officers

Deployment stress, substance use difficulties, and depression will add to the challenges that normally occur in a workplace. An important aspect of your progress in reintegrating into the workplace after deployment is being able to communicate about any struggles. Open communication will help to get support, especially if any special allowances are needed in order to recover. However, sharing personal information with authorities about difficult life experiences can be a challenge.



TIPS FOR APPROACHING EMPLOYERS AND COMMANDING OFFICERS ABOUT PROBLEM ISSUES

- Talk with a trusted counselor or family member or friend before telling an employer or commanding officer so that the pros and cons of sharing problems and concerns can be carefully weighed.
- Choose carefully who to talk to in the workplace. For example, there may be a number of people in the “chain of command” but perhaps only a direct supervisor needs to know. And there should be a good reason to tell this person.
- Consider an employer’s possible reactions. Will they understand? Will they listen? If it is expected that the employer or commanding officer will not be supportive, then it is best to be prepared.
- Test the water a little. Try a brief conversation and check the reaction. It is not necessary to give full details at once.



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When considering whether to discuss stress reactions with your employer or commanding officer, it is best to look at the pros and cons. The chart that follows lists commonly raised issues.

Possible Pros of Discussing Deployment Stress with Employer or Commanding Officer	Possible Cons of Discussing Deployment Stress with Employer or Commanding Officer
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• They can become more understanding and supportive.• They may realize that leaving a situation is not about avoiding work but may be a way to manage deployment reactions.• They may be more accepting of irritability, withdrawal, or other symptoms.• They can learn what happens in the process of recovery.• They may come to understand that certain things trigger symptoms.• They can learn what they can do to help.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• More pressure from supervisors.• Increased anxiety and stress.• Feelings of worthlessness.• Less assistance and forgiveness for problems in performance.• Less opportunity for information.• Low trust.• Little recognition for accomplishments.• Being less likely to be promoted.



Remember: When building formal work relationships or discussing problem areas, the key is problem solving and positive communication.

DON'T Tell Everything: It's okay to leave some things out of the conversation. Stay focused on how problems affect the workplace. Don't be caught off-guard – plan ahead concerning areas that should be kept private.

DON'T Talk About Details of Deployment or Trauma: Sometimes people need to understand the current experience, not what happened in the past. They can be told about past events briefly and generally, ("I saw people die." or, "I almost died." or "I saw terrible things."). But there is no reason to go into the details. Remember: when building formal work relationships or discussing problem areas, the key is problem solving and positive communication.



Prepare what will be said ahead of time.

DO Focus. What needs to be said? It is best to focus on how any problems are affecting the workplace, and what is being done to manage those problems.

DO Stay Positive. Explain things in a positive way. This helps put superiors at ease and provides reassurance. Educate non-military superiors that war affects people in powerful and lasting ways, and that steps are being taken to improve coping skills.

DO Explain the Purpose of the Conversation. Part of recovery means letting others know about the effects that deployment can sometimes have (for example, PTSD, substance abuse, depression). Indicating that counseling is ongoing is a personal choice, but may help if time away from the workplace is being requested to attend appointments.

DO Problem-Solve. Discuss problems that may affect work performance and plans for dealing with those problems.

DO Focus on Work Success. Emphasize the importance you place on succeeding at work, and doing the things that will support work performance.